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Car Bomb Explodes in Lebanon; Number of Casualties Is Disputed

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BEIRUT, Lebanon, Sept. 3 — A car packed with explosives blew up in southern Lebanon today. The driver was killed, but there were conflicting reports about other casualties.

The Israeli radio, monitored here, said that apart from the driver of the car no one was hurt. But a pro-Syrian group that said it was responsible for the action said 30 Christian militiamen of the South Lebanon Army and seven Israeli soldiers were killed or wounded.

This was the sixth suicide car bomb to explode in or near Israel's so-called security zone in the last two months.

Israel set up the strip north of its border to provide, it said, protection against guerrilla attacks. The roughly six-mile-wide zone is controlled by 1,500 Christian militiamen backed by Israel. The militia is commanded by a retired Lebanese Army General, Antoine Lahd. An estimated 500 Israeli soldiers work with the militia.

Lebanese radio stations reported that within minutes of the blast, militia artillery gunners pounded a number of Moslem Shiite villages near the town of Nabatiye. There were no immediate

reports of casualties.

The Israeli radio quoted militia sources as saying the driver of the booby-trapped blue Mercedes apparently arrived at a roadblock 15 miles north of the Israeli border during the night and was waiting for the road to open at dawn. The sources said the car exploded before any of the guards of the Christian militia arrived. It was not known if the driver accidentally set off the explosives or whether there was some technical problem that made the bomb go off prematurely.

The Baath Party organization in Lebanon, which took credit for two other suicide car bomb attacks earlier, said Christian militiamen and Israeli guards were on duty when the vehicle exploded. "Thirty S.L.A. soldiers and seven Israeli intelligence officers fell as a result," the group said in a statement issued here. It did not explain whether this meant the victims were killed or wounded.

The organization is a branch of Syria's ruling Baath Party, which is headed by President Hafez al-Assad.